

Sermon preached by Rev Tom Halls at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney on
Wednesday 7th March 2007. Reading: John 8:1-11
Topic: "A Hopeless Case"

1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, sir," she said. Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Loneliness is a terrifying need. Withdrawing from other people can make it hard for them to help us overcome that need. Then we only have ourselves to blame. Loneliness also occurs when others exploit our weaknesses using us but never really caring for our welfare and happiness. The woman whatever her sins [and they are not clarified] was a pawn in a much deeper political game.

The crowds went home [7:53] Jesus remained alone on the Mount [8:1]
Early he came again into the temple [8:2]; a place of cleansing and calling for him. There he drove out those who had changed His father's House from a place of prayer to a [black?] market for the sale of animals to be sacrificed [2:13]. There too he called in those thirsting for truth "Come to me and drink" [7:37; Chap 2]. Once again "All the people came to him" [8:2]. They had questions. he provided answers. In the traditional way "he sat down to teach them".

1 A SELF RIGHTEOUS CROWD [8:3-9a]
Scribes and pharisees also came bringing a decoy to entrap Jesus.
[i] They brought a woman [8:3]

- "caught in the act" of adultery
These perverts had been slinking in the shadows and peeping in windows apparently, prying like modern news hounds. This was obviously a set up for true people of God have no pleasure in seeing sin occur.

- "set in the midst"
The focus was placed on the woman [in the way modern TV cameras do].
This was calculated to humiliate her and catch out Jesus. There is nothing to indicate moral outrage or offence at God's Law being broken.

[ii] They called Jesus "teacher" [8:4]
Yet they were not willing to submit to his teaching [v6] Four things resulted.

They condemned the woman without presenting any evidence to support their accusation. "This woman was caught in the act." Since this particular sin requires two people we must ask, 'Where was the man', and why were these pervert peeping bedroom windows? Where they looking for this sin, wanting it to happen?

They challenged Jesus, setting him up like politicians at question time. "Moses commanded us to stone her What do you say?" [8:5]. John explains their aim, "They did this to tempt [trick] him" wanting to accuse him [8:6]. Jesus did not dignify their hypocrisy with an explanation: another occasion where 'Silence is golden'. They were not thirsting for truth. "He stooped down and wrote in the dust." We cannot know what he wrote, but one has to wonder whether it was 'hypocrites', or something similar. He knows what is in minds [2:25]. These accusers have neither love for God, nor loathing of sin. They want to bring down Jesus and in their scheming ambition will humiliate anyone and use anything to achieve their end.

They continued to interrogate him [8:7]: such is the arrogance of religious hypocrisy. In a move calculated to drive them back under the rocks from under which they have emerged, Jesus stood up. He set the standard for judgement. "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." When nobody moved, he stooped down and doodled in the dust again [8:8].

They cowered away [8:9a] One by one from the eldest bigot to the youngest zealot they made their escape with a minimum of dignity.

2 A LONELY WOMAN [8:9b-11]

Having driven away her accusers, Jesus began a genuine encounter with the woman.

[i] Jesus was left alone with the woman

This parallels the meeting he had with a woman beside an ancient well [John 4], when Jesus exposed the gnawing loneliness sex outside of a marriage commitment creates. He offered that woman peace at last through commitment to God's way; likening the experience to never thirsting again. Here in the Temple [John 8:9b] the spotlight has gone from the woman with the flight of her accusers. We do not know whether she was guilty of the sin specified in their charge so we cannot declare her innocence. But like the woman by the well she discovered that it is better to be alone with God where right decisions can be made.

[ii] Jesus stood up and spoke to a willing listener

To another thirsty listener Jesus offered a new relationship with God through faith in himself as God's Son. "Where are they? Didn't anyone condemn you?" [8:10] "No one Lord. Neither do I condemn you" [8:11; 3:16-17]. He did not condone sin where it existed. "Go on your way and sin no more". Forgiveness, like restored health, brings responsibilities [5:14]. Every encounter with Jesus provided opportunity to do good or evil. After Queen Alexandra of England called the nation and Empire to prayer for the healing of her husband King Edward VII a second time, and the Lord was pleased to heal the man on both occasions, she had inscribed on the lectern in the chapel at Sandringham words from the Psalms, "When I was in trouble, I called on the Lord and he heard me". That is the attitude a saving or healing encounter with Jesus should produce. We recognise his sovereign control. We accept his loving provision, especially of the Saviour; and, diligently go forward to honour him in every aspect of our new life.